

TWENTY-EIGHT LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
 Territory of the Virgin Islands
 REGULAR/SPECIAL SESSION 10
 ROLL CALL

Bill No: 28-0159

Date: 5/8/2010

An Act amending title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 171 commemorating laborers on Fireburn Day as a day to be revered and remembered in the Virgin Islands

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

- (a) Introduced and sent to Committee on.....Date.....
- (b) Reported from Committee and sent to Rules on.....
- (c) Reported from Committee on Rules.....
- (d) Recalled from Committee by Special Order.....
- (e) Adopted on..... *Adopted*
- (f) Rejected on..... *Amended*

MEMBERS	YEA	NAY	ABSENT	NOT VOTING
BARSHINGER, Craig W.	1			
ONSATORG, Adlah	2			
DOWE, Carlton	3			
HILL, Louis Patrick	4			
JAMES, Neville A.	5			
JAMES, Wayne	6			
MALONE, Shawn-Michael	7			
NELSON, Terrence	8			
O'REILLY, Nereida Rivera	9			
RICHARDS, Usie R.	10	1		
SANES, Sammuel	11			
SPRAUVE, Patrick, S.	12			
THURLAND, Michael	13			
WHITE, Celestino A. Sr.	14			
WILLIAMS, Alvin L.	15			

CERTIFIED TRUE AND CORRECT

Close Malone,

02/16/10-REPORTED OUT TO THE FLOOR
01/21/10-AMENDED AND REPORTED OUT TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY
12/07/09-NO ACTION TAKEN

BILL NO. 28-0159

Twenty-Eighth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

September 24, 2009

An Act amending title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 171 commemorating laborers on Fireburn Day as a day to be revered and remembered in the Virgin Islands

PROPOSED BY: Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson

1 **WHEREAS**, after the emancipation of enslaved Africans within the Virgin
2 Islands, work continued on the plantations; and

3 **WHEREAS**, competition from European sugar-beet growers and other sugar
4 producing countries had a negative impact on the Virgin Islands' plantation-based
5 economy during the nineteenth century; and

6 **WHEREAS**, after the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the slaves,
7 plantation growers employed contract immigrant laborers and former slaves. To reduce
8 operating expenses and gain the competitive edge, employers began to exploit their
9 workers; and

10 **WHEREAS**, on January 26, 1849, the Danish Government issued a Labor Act
11 that restricted the bargaining power and mobility of plantation laborers by fixing their

1 wages and requiring that on October 1st they sign a contract to work on a particular
2 plantation for an entire year; and

3 **WHEREAS**, poor living conditions, low wages prevailed; and

4 **WHEREAS**, October 1st of each year ended a plantation laborer's contract, and
5 this gave the laborer the ability to contract on a neighboring plantation for the following
6 year; and

7 **WHEREAS**, on July 3, 1848, and every year after, employers promised increased
8 wages and better living and working conditions; and

9 **WHEREAS**, every year, the employers failed on all promises; and

10 **WHEREAS**, in 1878, after all peaceable attempts to demand a better quality of
11 life failed, women on St. Croix, known as Queens, Queen Mary Thomas, Queen Mathilde
12 Macbean, Queen Susanna "Bottom Belly" Abrahamson and Axeline "Queen Agnes"
13 Salomon, Rebecca Fredericks and others, together with men including: Joe Paris, James
14 de Silva, Joseph LaGrange, John Lewis, Thomas Graydon, Francis Leonard, William
15 Jones, William Arnold, and others organized a revolt to repeal the Labor Act of 1849,
16 demand comparable wages to that of St. Croix Central Factory workers, and obtain better
17 working and living conditions; and

18 **WHEREAS**, when their demands were not met, and lacking alternative means of
19 redressing their long-standing grievances, they burned down towns and sugar cane
20 plantations. By the end of the "Fireburn", which lasted one week, eight hundred seventy-
21 nine acres from Estate Prosperity to Peters Rest on St. Croix were burned, including 43 or
22 more sugar plantations; and

23 **WHEREAS**, the 1878 labor revolt contributed to the achievement of fair labor
24 standards, wage increases, a higher standard of living and quality of life for laborers on
25 St. Croix; and

1 **WHEREAS**, it is befitting to commemorate the struggles and sacrifices of early
2 laborers and labor leaders by designating October 1 as Fireburn Day; Now, Therefore,

3 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:*

4 **SECTION 1.** Title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 171, is amended in
5 subsection (a) after “(Labor Day)” by inserting “October 1 (Fireburn Day)”.

BILL SUMMARY

7 The bill amends title 1, section 171 of the Virgin Islands Code to designate
8 October 1 of each year as Fireburn Day in commemoration of the sacrifices and struggles
9 made in the field of labor relations.

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11 BR09-0665/May 28, 2009/ revised 9/17/09

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ROLL CALL

Bill No:

28-0159

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WILLIAMS, Alvin L.	15			

CERTIFIED TRUE AND CORRECT

TMH
Drafted or Reviewed
Legal Counsel

AMENDMENT TO BILL NO. 28-_____
Offered by Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson

Bill No. 28-_____ is amended by adding two appropriately numbered sections to read:

“**SECTION 1.** Bill No. 28-0159 is amended by deleting Section 1 in its entirety and inserting a new Section 1 to read as follows:

‘**SECTION 1.** On October 1 of each year, ‘Fire Burn Day’ shall be observed and recognized in the Virgin Islands. Appropriate ceremonies shall be held in all public schools in the Virgin Islands to reflect upon this most important day in the history of the Virgin Islands. The Commissioner of Education shall be responsible for the reproduction and dissemination of information about Fire Burn Day to all public, private and parochial schools.’.”

Amendment No. 28-821/ March 5, 2010/ TMH